

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

PRIVILEGE

ENJOYED BY THE

HIGHLANDS of SCOTLAND,

UNDER THE PRESENT

EXCISE LAWS.

MDCCXCVIII.

4



OBSERVATIONS, &c.

IN considering the Case for the Lowland Distillers, that has been submitted to the Committee, it is impossible not to observe the care that is taken to keep the real merits of the question out of sight. Instead of once touching on the principles that first induced Government to grant an indulgence to certain districts, to carry on the distillery at a lower rate of excise than their neighbours, the case dwells solely on a comparison of the different modes of exacting the excise, and on assertions of hardships endured by the Lowland distillers, from the practices of their neighbours, within the privileged line.

It is curious to observe the different grounds the Lowland distillers have occasionally taken, in the various stages of their grand plan, of monopolizing the Scots corn market; for that such a

monopoly is their object, incredulity itself can hardly doubt; and should they succeed in their present plans, their monopoly is obtained. Not very long ago, when the great distillers hoped to carry their object by a coup de main, they came forward as ruined men, and as ruined solely by the practices of the Highland distillers.—Assertion was piled upon assertion: the Lowlands, they said, were glutted with an inundation of Highland whiskey, selling at a lower price than they could possibly afford; they asserted (and some of them still affect to believe) that Highland barley was equal in quality to that of the Lowlands.—They asserted, that the poor illiterate Highlanders were superior in skill to the most dexterous of themselves; that men working their stills without any aid of machinery or buildings; many of them without even the necessary utensils of their trade, and working in black huts, often remote from any road where a wheel could pass, with the dearest and worst of fuel, with no other idea of either the mechanical or chemical nature of a still, than simply, and in a rude manner, driving over the spirit, and catching it in bottles, could actually produce an equal, nay, a superior quantity of spirit to what the Lowland distillers could, with every aid that machinery, buildings, complete apparatus, and the most consummate experience and science could afford; though they carried on their
business

business in the heart of a rich and populous country, with plenty of the finest fuel, and with navigable rivers, canals, or turnpikes, to their very doors; with, in short, every contrivance honest, and dishonest, that ingenuity could invent, or money execute. To support these assertions against a distant and unoffending country, a number of paltry tricks were played off; every dram-shop or public-house, of inferior resort in Edinburgh, and the other great towns of Scotland had, "Highland Whiskey sold here," wrote in capitals, while the stuff sold by these poison shops (ninety-nine out of an hundred of which are either in the actual possession of, or under the immediate controul of the distillers) is manufactured at their own distilleries, not five miles from where it is swallowed, and is of such a quality that a real Highlander would require some days of abstinence, before he could be brought to palate it.

Samples of corn were carefully procured from some favoured spot within the privileged line, and industriously and unfairly displayed as the average quality of Highland barley. Who that was at Edinburgh, about the time I am speaking of, does not recollect, how almost every circle in the town, was bored by tricks of this kind of charlatanry I now mention! backed by calculations without end, where the maximum on one side,
and

and the minimum on the other were coupled together, in combinations infinite, and displayed before the ignorant or the prejudiced, as clear convictions of the produce of our barley and stills, and the magical dexterity of our Highland whiskey makers? By these means they worked on the passions of many Lowland gentlemen, and filled them with an unjust indignation against the Highland exemption, which they have been led to think hostile to their own agricultural interests. The distillers of the Lowlands expected, that while this ferment of passion prevailed, they should be able to hurry on their plans, and attain their object, before the Highland interest could recover from the shock it had received at hearing of such an attempt to annihilate their agriculture, and starve their people.

So great was the desire of the distillers to profit by the hold they had contrived to get on the passions of their neighbours, that (like good and pious people as they are) they called in the aid of religion and morality; and whined most methodistically, on the spiritual benefits that must arise to the reformed Highlander, when restricted from his favourite beverage, and (what is strange to tell) even this cant, even in such mouths, had its effect, and procured them many advocates. That men so devoutly given, should, *as distillers*, acquiesce

quiesce in the appellation of *slow poisoners* is not so surprizing, the idea has been long annexed to their trade, and was become to them a kind of *nomme de guerre*, but it is really wonderful that such religious gentlemen should become *direct poisoners*, should use mineral acids in their business, and manufacture that horrible, that murderous stuff, so emphatically styled by the Highlanders, *TURK*.

All these manœuvres however were not crowned with the compleat success that was expected: delays took place, the Highland interest rallied and began to call out in their own defence, and they appealed in a style that it was impossible to resist listening to at least; they did not ask for precipitate measures, they did not (*as has been lately done elsewhere*) ask for resolutions to be come to *before* enquiry had taken place, they only asked a candid hearing and a fair field in which they might come to issue with their opponents, and they desired to stand or fall as the facts asserted against them by their enemies themselves should be proved or disproved. They wished to have a few explanations. It was rather difficult for them to comprehend how the Highland whiskey makers contrive to inundate and undersell their Lowland neighbours; when it is a notorious fact that Lowland whiskey was never sold all over the Highlands at less than from two pence to four pence per pint Scots, cheaper than
the

the Highland whiskey could be afforded for even at the door of the house it is made in. At the hour I write this, Highland whiskey is 6s. per gallon English on the spot, and Lowland whiskey little more than half that price. As to the equal quality of their barley when compared with Lowland barley, they almost doubted the possibility of the Lowland distillers finding impudence enough in themselves to assert it, or folly enough in others to believe it. They denied point blank the possibility of the Highland distillers producing equal quantities of spirits in a given time as the Lowlanders: for putting skill out of the question, they asked how it was possible for an Highland distiller without corn markets in his country, and without carriage roads for the conveyance either of his corn or whiskey, who was in short, obliged to be his own corn factor, distiller, and spirit dealer, and to carry on these various trades at great distances, and with great loss of time,* could produce equal quantities in equal time with a Lowland distiller, who is in every respect so differently situated?

* The "Cafe" has with a pleasantry not very attractive sneered in page 14 at the farmers, taylor and shoemakers concerned in Highland distilleries. I thank them for the observation, and would beg to ask the committee whether it can be conceived, that a trade which by the avowal of its professed enemies cannot *alone* support its operators, can be so undercharged with duties, or carried on with so ruinous a rivalry as they (the Lowland distillers) assert?

The

The retail shops for Highland Lowland whiskey they treated lightly, only observing, *de gustibus non est disputandum*, they wished their judges to take a taste, and thought that would be sufficient. The question of morality they did not wish to enter into, professing, that considering the quarter from which it came, they did not think it urged seriously, nor could they comprehend how a poor Highlander would be more injured either in his health or morals, by drinking at a dear rate the wholesome produce of his own industry, than by drinking very cheaply that infernal poison, *TURK*. While there is any competition, the health and morals of the Highlander are protected, and he will prefer his taste to his pocket ; but take away the competition, and (considering his habits of life and the climate he lives in) he must be either starved with wet and cold, or poisoned with *TURK*.

It is much more convenient to make assertions than fairly to meet an enemy for their proof or refutation ; and I am at a loss which to admire most, the boldness and industry of these gentlemen in making assertions against their Highland neighbours, or their skill and address in perpetually avoiding the coming to issue on any one point. It is not my intention to follow the enemy through all the mazes of his tortuous march ; that were a

B

labour

labour both useless and endless : I will try to catch our Proteus in the shape in which he at present offers himself, and I will just sketch out a few facts, which, being either proved or refuted, I apprehend any person of common sense, and unprejudiced mind, will be able to draw his own conclusion without error.

The points I wish to consider are :

1. The motives that induced Government to grant an indulgence to the Highlands.

2. The operation of that indulgence in the improvement of the country.

3. The comparative improvement of the Lowlands, and the effects the Highland indulgence can or cannot have on their industry and agriculture.

4. Whether the same circumstances still exist in the Highlands that first induced Government to grant the indulgence, and the probable consequences of withdrawing it just now, both as the Highlands locally, and the rest of the kingdom as connected with the Highlands, will be affected.

In

I. In all extensive kingdoms or states one of the greatest difficulties, that is felt by legislators, must ever be the equalizing of revenue:—Extent implies difference of climate, soil, situation and produce, and *these* of course involve in themselves great difference of ability, in different districts, for paying those imposts which are necessary for the maintenance of the state. Should Government, with unrelenting precision, exact the same duty, from the same produce, either of nature or art, in every distinct and dissimilar situation; it is plain the whole realm is put into the bed of Procrustes: either the richer parts of the kingdom will not contribute in any proportion to their ability, or the poorer districts must be pressed beyond their power. Yet, it must be owned, that the adjustment of the quantum of diminished payment, that is to be allowed to any district, in consideration either of inferior quality of produce, or of disadvantageous situation; and the restrictions under which such an indulgence is to be enjoyed, are among the most delicate arrangements that a statesman can undertake; but such modification, though attended with difficulties, is not less necessary: both humane, and political considerations, point out that it is an indispensable duty of Government, to modify as far as possible, the burthens that are imposed, to the powers of those who are to bear them.

Revenue, though a most important, is not the only consideration that should occupy a statesman's thoughts ; the population of the country, and the happiness (and consequent attachment to government) of that population, are of at least equal importance ; but population can never increase, or even keep its ground, where the people cannot live by the produce of their soil and labour ; and happiness and attachment to Government are inconsistent with unequal taxation, and burthens beyond the ability of the people to bear.

On these fair, obvious, and incontrovertible principles, the Highlanders wish the merits of their antagonists and themselves to be decided ; *they* (the Highlanders) wish no monopoly, they wish not to crush any rivals for their own advantage ; they wish not by misinformation, and unfair statements, to prejudice and inflame the passions of the landed interest, that under a misapprehension of non-existing grievances, that interest may become a tool in their hands, to enforce the ruin of their rivals, for the benefit of their own deep laid and self interested monopoly, a monopoly that in the end must, if it is obtained (as it surely will be if the Highland distillery is ruined) operate against that interest, which in a moment of blind anger against an ideal foe, is making itself the stepping stool of its future oppressors. The reasons that
led

led Government to grant a partial diminution of the duties on stills worked in certain districts of the Highland country, are so obvious, that they scarce need be mentioned ; they consist of the following disadvantages : remoteness of situation and from markets ; inaccessibility of country, from a total want of roads, canals, or other modes of conveyance ; badness of climate, and sterility of soil, with consequent inferiority of grain ; and, the poverty and ignorance of the people. These disadvantages prevail more or less through the whole of the privileged line, and in most places I am sorry to say, the whole band combine with a force of which a southern imagination can hardly form an idea.

Thus far every principle of justice and humanity inforce the propriety of the indulgence granted to the Highlands : but, I am inclined to believe, Government had views much more enlarged in granting this indulgence. Independent of the obvious inequality of that principle of taxation, that should make a poor barren, mountainous, inaccessible, and distant country pay the same sum for the privilege of distilling its grain, that is paid by a country in every point directly the reverse, and producing grain of a superior quality in general, as two to one, and on *a fair average*, no where less superior than as three to two ; independent, I say, of this consideration, which

which might be termed a permission to the Highlander to exist, Government wished to encourage the Highlander, and by stimulating his industry, to induce him to make the most of that sad country, in which his lot is cast. It must be owned that the encouragement was needed, if increased population (which must increase both our national strength and the consumption of our national manufactures) was wished for ; as never perhaps was Ceres wooed under more inauspicious circumstances than in the Highlands of Scotland, yet pressed with assiduity she has not utterly refused her favours, and few countries can shew better specimens of what human industry and perseverance are capable.

Government acted therefore at once benevolently and wisely, in encouraging Highland tillage ; it was the only obvious immediate source of increased Highland population ; but, in a country producing in many places, grain fit for nothing else but distillation, and *no where* (I speak of the Country, and not of hot-bed farms tilled by noblemen or gentlemen) grain that could compare with Lowland grain ; tillage could not be encouraged unless the frowns of nature were compensated for by the smiles and indulgence of Government.

2. I now

2. I now come to consider the effects of this indulgence on the prosperity and improvements of the Highlands, and it is such as must warm the heart of any one except a dealer in TURK. The extent of the indulgence is just such as to allow them their own market for the consumption of their own grain, through the medium of their stills. Under this indulgence many thousands of acres have been cultivated, where the plough had never pierced, had it not been for this opening granted to the consumption of what it should produce, and where all cultivation must immediately cease, should the indulgence be withdrawn.

The rage for sheep farming has been so far checked, as to confine the grazing plan nearly to those parts, obviously intended by nature for nothing else. Benevolent landlords have eagerly grasped at what enabled them (consistently with prudence and justice to their own families) to retain, and even increase the number of their tenantry*; and thus to a degree the depopulation
of

* And where the depopulation had already taken place, an assylum has been furnished for at least part of the unhappy and dismissed tenantry on the neighbouring estates, under the name of *Colonists*:—this word requires a little explanation, to make it intelligible to the Committee; it has been the practice, time out of mind, in the Highlands, for the proprietors of land to put the few artisans and labourers they want, over and above what are maintained in their own families,

of the country has been prevented by the direct and immediate operation of the indulgence; its less-obvious, but not less certain operation, through remote causes, has not been less beneficial; and in several districts, this indulgence has encouraged various branches both of agriculture and manufactures, whose connection with it at first sight is not very distinctly observable; but when the tendency of one resource to propagate another is considered; and when it is considered that the possession of a little capital invariably brings with it the desire of possessing more, and thereby stimulates industry in

families, and on their own farms, on detached moors, sometimes absolutely barren ones, where they built poor huts and cultivated a cabbage ground, and perhaps an acre or so of the stubborn subject round them:—as long as the Ferintosh distillery enjoyed its exclusive privilege, it was observed that the colonies in that vicinity improved ground fast, while colonists in distant situations having no encouragement for their industry, remained at a stand, both as to number and extent of improvement: their number did not exceed what their landlord could employ, and their improvements were confined to the production of what was just sufficient for the existence of their families; but since the licences to stills have opened to them a market for their grain, their exertions have been incredible; some extend their improvements to four or five acres, and some to five times that number. The number of colonists also encreases rapidly, and independently of the demands for labour by the landlord; nay, in many cases, the landlord can with difficulty get the labour of his own colonists. The writer of this note knew one estate, at not near 200l. a year, where a gentleman, on acquiring it, augmented his rental 50l. a year, by making the colonists pay him rent; and yet so much a matter of yesterday had their improvements been, that the seller was ignorant of them.

every

every possible direction, the connection will be obvious. This indulgence gave stability to the husbandman, by assuring to him a reasonable remuneration for his labour ; and a little property thus procured, enabled him and his family to push their industry in various ways, according to their respective habits and abilities. The farmer has bettered his practice, and by increasing the variety of his produce, increased his chance of success ; while some of that produce, flax for example, has in its turn laid the foundation of other modes of industry, by which means the manufacturer has been induced to establish his looms in districts he would otherwise never have thought of visiting.

Nor has this been the sole good arising from the stills : they themselves and their produce have been a direct and most important source of improvement, both to Highland agriculture and to the real and healthy comforts of life in their vicinity : the refuse of the stills feeds winter meat,* and hence has enabled several vicinities to establish weekly markets where they were never heard of before. Till lately, there was no weekly market north of Inverness, nor was that market nearly as well supplied, either as to quantity or quality of meat

* In many instances of Highland stills it is a known fact that the refuse of the still is the sole profit expected by the distiller ; would a Lowland distiller be contented with so moderate a profit ?

as now. Formerly, at the commencement of winter, every Highland family as regularly killed, and salted their winter food, as if they had been going to sea, and no fresh flesh meat was to be had till the grafs furnished it, towards the middle, and end of summer, in a wet, ungenial, and backward climate.

I will say nothing of the infinite advantage of this improvement, both to the health and comforts of life, nor of the important effects of the reaction of these markets on the agriculture of the country. They are obvious; but great as they are, they are not the greatest benefit likely to arise from the stills. The art of artificial fattening of cattle, has given men's minds a turn for considering the nature and advantages of winter feeding, and a prospect is opened (God forbid it should be rashly and hastily shut) of that greatest of all Highland improvements, *the balancing of the summer and winter stock*, an object without agriculture impossible to be obtained; and agriculture cannot, in these parts, be carried on without licensed stills. As a proof of the progress towards this balance, I appeal to every one conversant with the Highlands of Scotland, for the obvious, and in some places, rapid increase of green crops, and artificial grasses; and for the known fact, that summer grazings are now only to be had, by sending farther into the hills, and at higher prices than formerly.

On

On the whole, my view of the subject differs essentially from that of the author of the Case of the Lowland Distillers, that when I consider the increased national strength, and national consumption that must attend the encouragement of the agriculture and population of the too long neglected North, I am convinced that Government would find its general revenue and prosperity much increased, if, instead of screwing up the Highlands, beyond their power to pay, and even sacrificing them to the interests of a few greedy individuals, for the sacrilegious price of a few temporary pence, it would consider how far it was possible to extend the privileged line, and to diminish the duty on Highland industry, without lowering the revenue.

3. But this privilege is asserted to be attended with very baleful consequences, not only to the revenue, and to the Lowland distillers, but to the whole landed interest of the Lowlands. This is strong ground for the Lowland distillers to take; and could they make out their Case on this ground, few people would hesitate as to what ought to be the result: unluckily for them, however, there is some distinction between assertion and proof; and as the refusal to their modest request of the Committee's coming to a few resolutions in their favour, *first*, and enquiring into their propriety *afterwards*,

gives a little time to obviate their assertions, I shall make use of it.

An unprejudiced observer, upon being told of these grievances, and of the devastation, the encroachments, the Highland distillers have made on the property of the Lowland distillers, and on the whole landed interest of the Lowlands, will naturally look around him for the inevitable consequences of these facts; which, if true, *must* be apparent in the decrease of Lowland rentals, in the diminished buildings and apparatus of the Lowland distillers; and in a proportionally increased convenience, at least, if not splendor, in the laboratories of their Highland rivals.—How must such an observer be puzzled, when he finds appearances diametrically opposite to his expectation; when he sees the rents of all the Lowland corn farms increasing beyond any thing ever heard of, and in a proportion far beyond English ground of similar quality, and better situated!—When he sees palaces, under the name of distilleries, rising in every corner of the Lowlands; their smokes obscuring the noon-day sun; their proud façades staring contempt on their beggarly rivals, while their recesses are stored with every machinery for expediting, and every invention for facilitating their manufacture, that human ingenuity can invent, or wealth procure. In the Highlands, on the contrary, he sees the distillery

tillery going on in its primitive state; the roof that covers the works and the workmen, generally consists of sods supported by a few sticks, and the whole raised on the margin of some spring or brook. They must go to the water, because their profits do not admit of the most simple contrivance for bringing the water to them.

The whole stock in trade of many of the distillers consists of the still and worm, a few dozen of bottles, and two or three small tubs. The kettle of the still is placed on a few loose stones, and the fire under it fed with a fuel that requires the constant attendance of a man to keep it from expiring; and often in wet seasons, the peat (or fuel) will hardly burn at all*.

Baffled by finding appearances so different from what he had been told was the reality, he must imagine something rather magical to exist in the distinction of those Highland depredators; he refers therefore to the map, and traces out the lines by the act of parliament; and what is his surprize at finding the very few points in which this line approaches either land or

* A striking instance of the contrast may be seen in going north by Kinross and Blair Atholl. Look a few miles north of Kinross, at the palace of one of the least of the Lowland distillers, and at Blair view the apparatus in a place something between a barn and a stable, of one of the very first of the privileged distillers.

sea conveyance, and the utter inaccessibility either by sea or land, of by far the greatest part of the privileged country, and what must be his reflection?—It must be this: that only two modes of conveyance for the smuggled whiskey can be admitted; either that the whole is brought down to the few points of practicable contact with the Lowlands, or that the whole is, as it were, sweated imperceptibly through every pore, from the privileged to the unprivileged district. The first mode must be impracticable, without detection, if we suppose either honesty to exist in any of the public officers, or a sense of their own interest in the Lowland distillers; and as to the second mode, it is rather difficult to imagine for what purpose whiskey should be conveyed in so expensive a manner, and in such small quantities as it must be.—Credulity itself will never believe it is to undersell the Lowland distillers, when it is notorious, that Highland whiskey, within the Highland line, is near double the price of Lowland whiskey: very far, it is true, is that Lowland whiskey from being of equal quality, but it is of equal strength. The Lowland distillers may daub “Highland Whiskey” “fold here” upon all their ale-house window-shutters to eternity, before they can destroy this fact, on which the Highland distillers wish earnestly to come to an issue with them. Shall I be accused of want of candour, when I assert that *it is something*

thing against a man's cause when in its support he calls in the assistance of cunning and *deceit*? shall I be allowed to examine the case of the Lowland distillers in this view?

There is a letter now before this Committee, it is addressed to the Board of Excise, by one of the leading men of the Lowland distillers, and without the least explanation, states as a proof of the fact, that spirits are poured from the Highland stills into the Lowlands; "that that fact is proved
 " by the licensed stills in the Highlands being of
 " much greater extent than in the Lowlands, while
 " the inhabitants of the former are infinitely less
 " numerous than the latter." I appeal to the common sense and feeling of every man who reads this case, whether such an unqualified assertion is not intended to convey the idea of perfect equality in both situations, and that a still of given capacity in the Highlands is permitted to consume as much grain, and produce as much spirit, as the same still would be allowed in the Lowlands. But how different is the fact? In the Highlands, a 40 gallon still is allowed to manufacture only 500 bolls of barley, and if it produces a gallon above 1660 gallons from that quantity, it pays 2s. 8d. of duty for every gallon above 1660. A 40 gallon still in the Lowlands is unlimited either as to the quantity of grain it may consume, or spirits it may produce;

produce; and (*did they confine themselves to grain alone*) it is proved in a report now before the committee, that a 40 gallon still does consume 3650 bolls of barley, from which it produces 36500 gallons of spirits; and this is far from an exaggerated calculation: Let us therefore compare the two facts fairly, equal contents against equal contents:

	<i>Bolls</i>	<i>Gallons</i>
100 Lowland stills will } consume	365,000	and produce 3,650,000
100 Highland stills are } confined to	50,000	and produce 166,000
Difference in favour of } the Lowland distiller	315,000	3,484,000

The candour of this disinterested gentleman may after this be left without comment; but I must again ask, if any unprejudiced person can believe that so vile a mis-statement was made by a professional man through inadvertency, or whether he will agree in thinking with me, that it was an impudent unprincipled attempt to impose on the legislature, and to trepan them into an act of injustice. That such was the intention I doubt not, but the coup de main did not succeed, and the grossness of the imposition was detected.—In the “Case of the Lowland distillers,” which it will not be denied comes from the same quarter, this fact is not brought forth in so bare-faced a manner, for fear, no doubt, of consequences:
yet

yet it was judged too important to be given up, and is therefore *insinuated* in page 7 of the Report. Let us analyse that page, or at least one of its statements : it is said that the Highlands, containing not much above 300,000 people, had entered 11,200 gallons, which is equal to 280 stills of 40 gallons each, while the Lowland district containing 1,400,000 people had only entered 10,200 gallons, which is only equal to 255 stills of 40 gallons each. Now let us compare these statements under the limits and liberties they respectively enjoy, and on the data taken before, and we shall find that the 280 Highland stills will produce 434,800 gallons only, while the 255 Lowland stills will produce 9,307,500 gallons, or a balance of 8,972,700 gallons in favour of the Lowlands.

It has already been pointed out to the Committee, by a gentleman much better informed on these subjects than I can pretend to be, that the diminished number of gallons entered in the Lowlands does not depend on the decreased production of spirit, but on the superior skill and management of the distillers in making the same contents of still throw over a larger quantity of spirit in a given time.

Having said thus much of the candour of the Lowland distillers, I will say a few words of their

D

wisdom

wisdom in bringing their cause into such broad-day-light; for I flatter myself it does not need much argument to shew that instead of the Highlands having the advantage of the Lowlands, the Lowlands have in a commercial view greatly the advantage of the Highlands, and that not only mediately through the superiority of their grain, situation and skill, but immediately in the respective duties actually paid when compared with the liberties enjoyed. A Lowland distiller pays 216ol. for the license duty of a 40 gallon still, from which he produces at least 36,500 gallons of spirits: now let us put this distiller on the same footing as the privileged distillers, either in the Highlands or in the intermediate line, i. e. let him in the first case pay 6l. 10s. per gallon on the contents of his still; and in the second case 9l. per gallon on the contents, and in either case 2s. 8d. per gallon for every gallon produced above 1660; and we shall find that in the first case he ought to pay 4905l. 6s. 8d. for his license, and in the second, 5005l. 6s. 8d.* This idea has been very

* The Lowland distiller may object to this calculation, by saying the 2s. 8d. is purposely imposed as a restriction against the Highlanders, and not meant as a duty they can pay. The objection, however, is invalid; for in stating their comparative situation and advantage in an undeniable proposition, the difference will be still more apparent in favour of the Lowlander. Thus let us say, as the Highlander pays 24ol. (or if you like 38ol.) on 1660 gallons, so should the Lowlander pay on 36,500 gallons.

strongly

strongly and accurately stated by the gentleman above alluded to, and that on stills of different sizes, from 20 to 50 gallons.

On the whole I hope it will appear to the Committee, that the Highlands really enjoy only what the legislature intended they should enjoy—an honest manufacture of their own grain for their own consumption, to encourage their agriculture, and to enable them to struggle against the many disadvantages of their situation. They neither do or can injure the Lowland distillers, so as to deprive them of a fair and just profit on their own capital and industry. But I confess, the Highlanders being allowed to distil, is a tremendous bar in their route to attaining a monopoly of the spirit, and consequently of the corn market of Scotland.

Much stress has been laid on the impolicy of local distinctions. I have stated that they are unavoidable, if Government intend to rule the different parts of the Empire with an equal hand. And though as the Lowland distillers say, *Government have not the power to equalize the irregular distribution of Nature*; yet Government have the power, and it is the absolute duty of Government, to modify and correct the operation of that *irregular distribution*.

But did these gentlemen from the South never hear of local exemptions and privileges, at least as

galling to the Highlands, as this privilege of distilling 500 bolls for 6l. 10s. a gallon is to the Lowland distillers.—Did these gentlemen never hear of the salt privileges enjoyed by the Frith of Forth? It would require but little argument to prove which was most detrimental: a privilege that tends to encourage the agriculture and population of a whole country, and notwithstanding all the ill-natured clamour raised against it, neither does or can injure any fair trader; or a privilege tending merely to the advantage of a few proprietors locally situated, excessively hurtful to the trade and agriculture of all the rest of the kingdom, and peculiarly hurtful to the Highlands, who by its operation are deprived of the power of using those bounties nature has so lavishly thrown on their coasts: for till the salt laws are altered, all talk and schemes for improving the Highland fisheries are mere quackery. Much might be said on this subject, but it is not coram nobis; and I only hint at it to shew, that the case of the Highlands enjoying a local privilege is not anomalous.

Nature denies us many advantages that the rest of the kingdom enjoy. Will Government, that ought to be the common parent of us all, exasperate this froward conduct of nature? and shall local privileges only be allowed their sanction,
when

when they operate against the Highlands? This may be the wish of the Lowland distillers, but far different, I hope, will be the conduct of Parliament.

4. In what I have said above, I have dwelt on circumstances, that to a person unacquainted with the Highlands may appear to have little connection with the privilege of distilling; but I mean to impress on my readers the fact, that the very existence of the Highlands depends on their being allowed to distil their grain, and that under such regulations, and at such a duty as are adapted to the nature of their country, and of their corn. I will now point out how far the present situation of the country will admit of this privilege being withdrawn, and what would be some of the consequences of such withdrawing.

Since the Highlands have enjoyed this privilege, which directly operates as a bounty on their agriculture; the population of the country has rapidly increased, notwithstanding the checks it received by the emigrations that took place when Highland rentals first began to be greatly raised, and sheep-farming to be introduced; and also notwithstanding the prodigious number of men drawn from thence during two long and bloody wars. I am convinced, that had it not been for this resource,
the

the greater part of the Highlands of Scotland had ere now been a desert; and it will be evident to the most superficial observer, that the more this population increases, the more the attention of Government will be required to foster it, and to enable it to stand its ground against the temptations that invite the landholder to divest himself of it. Grazing becomes every day more and more understood; and in the Highlands, the more it is understood, the greater is the temptation for the landholder to embrace that management. While however, the cultivation of corn can be carried on with profit, the temptation is resistible; but from the moment the Highlanders are deprived of the power of manufacturing their corn (no matter whether by a direct prohibitory law, by duties they cannot afford to pay, or by regulations the nature of their country does not admit of their complying with,) their power of raising corn with profit (except in a very few situations) must cease, and the consequence will not be, (as "the Case of the Lowland distillers," states) that "some landholders who have profited so greatly by the smugglers that settled on their estates, may complain of the diminution of their rents" (vide Case, p. 14.) but it will be the total ruin and annihilation of nineteen twentieths of the middling and lower orders of the people in the Highland of Scotland.—No doubt, a few gentlemen, whose bounds are not extensive,
and

and whose soil is adapted to the raising of corn, and whose estates have, by this privilege, been raised from a state of insignificance to a state of profit to themselves, and of ample production to the public stock, will suffer most severely; but the landholders in the Highlands, I do not think, would *as a body*, suffer *pecuniarily*: on the contrary, a great number would be forced to increase their incomes; but then this increase would be merely a few pounds in their own pockets, at the expence of a large, loyal, and useful population.—I say they would be forced, because while they can get profit from raising corn, many of them will not embrace the grazing system, for reasons too long and too obvious to mention here *.

Government will find it easier to pass the law that ruins a whole country, than to enforce its obedience, of which there was ample experience during the recent suspension of *all* distilling; I will say no more on the subject, than that the Highlanders distilled, and all the Gaugers there made fortunes.

Should the Highlands be thus cruelly dealt

* The risque of accidents where so much rent depends on one payer, is among the chief of these reasons; but banish the distilleries, and reduce the raising of corn to a losing trade, and that risque is of no consequence, or at least it must be run.

with,

with, there is every reason to imagine, that the affections and attachment of that loyal, hardy, and useful part of the British dominions, must be eventually estranged from the Government ; for it is certain no civil power could enforce the prohibition ; there must be an army of bayonets to support an army of excisemen : and the situation of the gentry would be equally hard ; they would be perpetually called on, as magistrates, to enforce the law ; and with what spirit could they be expected to act, when every warrant they signed was in fact, a sentence of ruin and exile to their tenantry and dependants all round them ? Smuggling also (which is now nearly or even quite ruined in the Highlands) would revive by a restriction that must operate as a direct bounty in its favour ; and the Highland coast would, as formerly, be covered with smuggling vessels of every description. But the most baleful of all the consequences, of this proposed annihilation of Highland distillery, would be that it would infallibly place the controul of the whole Scots corn market in the hands of the great distillers, and they would be enabled to raise, or sink, the price of corn as they pleased ; and there cannot be a doubt but the attainment of this monopoly is the real object they have in view. Should they succeed, Government will too late lament the having sacrificed a large and inoffensive portion of the British empire, at the shrine of a
cunning

cunning and interested set of monopolists; and the landed interest of the Lowlands, that now so blindly supports these speculators, will equally severely, and equally too late, lament the having assisted a dozen or two individuals to attain a power, that in process of time will not fail to oppress them, with a certainty equal to its immediate destruction of the Highlands of Scotland.

On the whole, it is earnestly hoped the Committee, who are now strongly pressed by the Lowland distillers (who know the apparent favourableness of the moment, from the low price of grain) will not be rash to decide. This low price evidently arises partly from the glut of corn, in consequence of an over importation during the late apprehension of scarcity, and partly perhaps from a combination of the great Scots distillers to keep back the consumption, with a speculative view to increase the hardship on the Lowland landed interest, and thereby to inflame their eagerness to support these supposed friendly endeavours of the great distillers to better the prices. Certainly corn, and especially barley, is at much too low a price just now; but its price is diminished in at least an equal proportion in the north, to what it is in the south, and the correction of the evil is not to be found in sacrificing one part of the empire to the self-interested views of the great distillers; but by a

prohibition on importation, and a moderate bounty (if the prohibition to import fails of effect) on exportation.

It is earnestly hoped the Committee will not decide on the written or printed assertions of the great distillers ; but that they will hear *both* sides of the question, and come to a fair and equitable decision—such as may at once guard and encrease the revenue, insure to the Lowland distillers a fair and honourable profit on their own capital and industry, and protect the Highlands in the only public encouragement they enjoy from Government ; an encouragement their climate and remote situation render so necessary, and of which their loyalty and peaceable behaviour render them so deserving. Above all, when such a resolution is come to, it is hoped the legislature will make it *permanent*, so that the Highlanders may at once know what they have to depend upon, and the Lowlanders be cut off from the hope of devouring them :—for as long as there is any opening, they never will cease harrassing the legislature, and keeping the minds of their poor Highland neighbours in a state of constant anxiety and alarm ; a situation, from which no good can, but much evil may arise.

FINIS.